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ABSTRACT

This report describes BRIDGES, an employment equity special measures training program developed by the City of Toronto (Ontario, Canada). It was designed to help women employees move from their traditional jobs into trades, technical or operation (TTO) jobs within their own organization. The program is a combination of classroom sessions, shop training, and a 3-week work placement. The success of this employment equity initiative is based on the philosophy and practice of empowerment. Using a combination of classroom, shop, and worksite modules, training takes place over 34 days in a 4-month period. Preparatory training is provided in such areas as self-assessment and skill transferability; management of change issues; development of a career change plan; dealing with workplace issues such as sexual harassment; worksite communication; and occupational fitness, health, and safety. Skill-based courses, in-house training, and on-the-job training are also offered. On completion of the course, the BRIDGES participants have the security of returning to their regular position while they apply for TTO jobs or pursue trades, technical, or operations studies. Barriers to change are discussed, followed by quotes from organizations and employees about their experiences with the BRIDGES program. Examples of results achieved through this program are listed, and information is included about resources available to introduce organizations to the program. (LLL)

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[THE BRIDGES PROGRAM]

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BRIDGES is an effective employment equity special measures training program developed by the City of Toronto, designed to help women employees move from their traditional jobs into trades, technical or operation (TTO) jobs within their own organization. The program is a combination of classroom sessions, shop training, and a three-week work placement. The success of this employment equity initiative is based on the philosophy and practice of empowerment.

The City offered this program on a cooperative and cost-sharing basis to both public and private sector organizations. Facilities, resources and expertise were shared in order to empower women employees to enter non-traditional jobs within their own organizations. **BRIDGES** has been successfully implemented for civic employees at the City as well as at the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, Consumers Gas, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Unitel Communications, AT & T, and Rogers Cable TV. Consumers Gas and the Municipality of Metro Toronto have used their learning experience with the City of Toronto's **BRIDGES** Program to implement their own internal **BRIDGES** this Spring. As well, the **BRIDGES** managers are consulting with the Alberta Government which is launching an adaptation of **BRIDGES** with Syncrude. There is a distinct advantage to such a shared process which avoids isolation, fosters cooperation and allows a tailoring of the program to each organization's needs.

Impetus for Change

Men are found in over 480 of the 500 Canadian occupation classifications but women are found in only 20 job categories. Occupational segregation is a reality in most public and private sector organizations. Increasingly, legislation will encourage equitable employment practices. It is particularly important for the public sector to take initiatives in this area.

By the year 2000 women will make up half of our available workforce. Women have proven themselves to be interested, competent and skilled in many non-traditional occupations. Their presence in these jobs is fundamental to Canada's future prosperity. An organization's investment in empowering its workers is nearly always rewarded with increased productivity. But the question for the nineties is not "why" employment equity, but "how" employment equity.

With respect to employment in trades, operations and technical jobs, research by the City of Toronto showed that women employees were experiencing problems moving into non-traditional jobs within their own organizations. There were gaps in information about non-traditional positions. One of the reasons that women did not often consider non-traditional occupations was that the majority of these jobs are carried out behind closed doors in shop areas, garages,

boiler rooms - all areas which women traditionally do not enter. There were also major gender-based gaps in skill and experience with hand and power tools. Another major gap was lack of confidence that they could do a traditional job. Often they were not realizing the transferability of their skills. For example, skills developed from using a sewing machine are readily transferable to skills required in carpentry. Bridging these gaps through tour, classroom training, shop training and actual hands-on work experience help women develop the necessary skill, confidence and experience required for non-traditional positions within their own corporations.

Program description

Using this combination of classroom, shop and worksite modules, training takes place over 34 days in a 4 month period. Preparatory training is provided in such areas as self-assessment and skill transferability; management of change issues; development of a career change plan; dealing with workplace issues such as sexual harassment; worksite communication; and occupational fitness, health and safety. Also offered are basic shop skill courses such as mechanical reasoning, introduction to power and hand tools, electrical theory and job site maneuvers. As well, the program includes in-house training and a block of actual on-the-job training. On completion of the course, the **BRIDGES** participants have the security of returning to their regular position while they apply for TTO jobs or pursue trades, technical or operations studies.

BRIDGES - empowering change agent

As an employment equity change agent, **BRIDGES** brings about increased empowerment, awareness, support and action with a wide range of key players. Rather than perceived solely as a "top down" initiative, awareness, support and action have come from the "bottom up" as well as the "middle out". Part of the empowerment process begins with our belief and expectation that program participants, other employees, and managers can deal with the important and complex issues of equality. A key to the success of **BRIDGES** is the consultative and collaborative process. Careful attention to potential resistors and to their motivation for resisting is effective in minimizing active resistance and developing wider ownership. The proactive, positive tone of the program is an ideal approach to breaking down organizational barriers. **BRIDGES** encourages the removal of barriers to change on three levels:

1. Organizational barriers are addressed directly. Demonstrating that the employees participating in the program were competent and effective at TTO work placements accomplished in three weeks what years of workshops and print communication could not have done.

Previously unidentified systemic barriers, such as the application process may surface during **BRIDGES** implementation. Having learned of these barriers the organization may then be mobilized into taking remedial action.

2. Attitudinal barriers are addressed positively, demonstrating that women are interested in TTO work and competent and accomplished. The program brings to the surface pockets of resistance and encourages managers to develop effective strategies for meeting such challenges as the elimination of sexual harassment.

3. Individual participants are empowered by learning new skills and building self-confidence through each of the program components.

The following quotes illustrate the impact the program has had on both organizations and employees:

o " The **BRIDGES** Program is more than just an excellent vehicle to prepare women for TTO occupations. It is a very effective way of demonstrating and communicating a Company's commitment to occupational desegregation, a key objective of Employment Equity for women."

Michele S. Darling, Director
Human Resources
Consumers Gas

o "The **BRIDGES** Program has allowed the women of Unitel the opportunity to experience work in non-traditional careers. It has, in turn, exposed Unitel to a new perception of its workforce. Both aspects will further Unitel's development in the Canadian telecommunications industry."

Unitel Communications

o Not only is **BRIDGES** an effective training program for women who aspire to move into a non-traditional work area, but it can provide a real impetus for positive organizational change".

Paul Scott, Director
Equal Employment Opportunity Division
Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto

o " **BRIDGES** absolutely confirmed my dream and has given me a head start in getting there. It gave me a fighting chance. I plan to go for it".

BRIDGES Graduate

o "It was wonderful. Something that I'll remember for the rest of my life. Before **BRIDGES** I was unsure of myself, when others said my interest in non-trad was just a phase, I didn't know what to believe. Now I trust myself and am ready to commit to a non-trad job for sure."

BRIDGES Graduate

o "I know I am interested in non-traditional work, but after being in the program I know even more how much I dislike office work and prefer a job that is physically more demanding and does not involve just sitting at the same desk every day".

BRIDGES Graduate

Results Achieved

1. Consumers Gas and the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto have used their learning experience with the City of Toronto's **BRIDGES** Program to mount their own internal **BRIDGES** in early Spring of 1991.

2. The Alberta Government is sponsoring a **BRIDGES** Program with the Syncrude Oil Company.

3. Graduates formed the **BRIDGES** Alumna Association, an indication of the extent of the program's empowering effect. It functions as a support group and an advocacy group to lobby against systemic discrimination.

4. Over 63% of graduates have already obtained permanent non-traditional positions or are in part-time study in trades, technology, or operation field. Additionally, 31% have had the opportunity to work in an extended temporary trade, technical, or operation assignment.

5. Additionally, we found the impact to extend beyond the women participating in the training program. Because of the high visibility of the program, the extensive press coverage, the positive informal feedback from the participants, organizations have developed a momentum towards employment equity. This in turn has generated more internal applications from women employees for non-traditional jobs. It also has a positive impact on external recruitment.

6. Empowerment is also demonstrated in the innovative adaptations developed by the participating organizations. For instance, at

Unitel, graduates participated in an extended 3-month apprenticeship and at Consumer Gas, graduates filled summer placement positions. These innovations have encouraged the City's Computer and Information Services Division to offer a 6-month apprenticeship training as a Network Technician for **BRIDGES** graduates. And similarly, our Parks and Recreation Department will be offering summer placement opportunities for women employees.

7. We have produced an excellent video on the program, which has been borrowed extensively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the **BRIDGES** Training program empowers organizations, managers, and employers to meet the challenge of employment equity through this "special measure". Its success is already being documented by its development in other organizations. The **BRIDGES** Program is an example of a creative innovative program developed for public sector organizations that is being utilized and emulated by other organizations, both public and private.

GETTING STARTED.....

BRIDGES has a number of resources available to introduce organizations to the program:

BRIDGES (Video, approx. 12 mins.)
An excellent, short introduction to the why, what and how of the program.
Call 392-7162 to borrow or purchase.

The **BRIDGES** Program Manual
A comprehensive guide to establishing your own in-house **BRIDGES** program. Currently in production. Call 392-7162 for more information.

Support for Organizations

"Retention: Workplace Support Strategies for Women in Trades, Technology, and Operations Work" (Booklet). Experienced guidance on developing a positive working environment for women in TTO jobs. $ 5.00 plus shipping and handling. Call 392-7162 to order.

For further information and resources, contact:

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